



[Q&A: Rep. Pence brings conservative message home](#)

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- ANDERSON - Back in his home district during Congress' month-long break, Republican Mike Pence visited Anderson on Tuesday. After a brief appearance at the Anderson Rotary Club's noon meeting, he sat down for a discussion with The Herald Bulletin's editorial board.

The discussion focused on the economy, health care and energy. Here's what Pence, the House Republican conference chairman, had to say:

THB: You favor an "all-of-the-above" approach to energy policy. How does that differ from the Obama Administration's cap-and-trade energy policy, which would essentially assess fines for energy produced from carbon-based sources like coal?

Pence: In Indiana, we get more than 90 percent of our energy from coal-fired power plants, so the cap-and-trade policy would hit us hard.

We can get to energy independence and greater energy efficiency without driving up the energy costs for homes and businesses, which is what the cap-and-trade program would do. Our "all-of-the-above" bill would use tax incentives and credits to encourage greater efficiency.

We call for exploration for oil on the East and West coasts and in Alaska. Then we would use the revenue from the oil leases to give loans to companies developing alternative energy. ...

Our bill includes the construction of 100 new nuclear power plants in 20 years. That sounds aggressive, but this country has built that many before.

THB: You've been a vocal opponent of the American Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Tell us about what you would espouse instead.

Pence: It's clear the stimulus is not working. We've lost 2 million jobs, and Indiana has lost 20,000. The antidote is fiscal discipline in Washington, D.C., and broad-based tax relief. What would happen if you gave \$3,000 back to every household in America and said this is yours, take it and spend it as you choose?

THB: You voted three times against the "cash-for-clunkers" program, which has proved to be pretty popular locally. Why?

Pence: I like the idea of putting money back in the hands of the people. But I don't like the idea of giving cash to some Americans and not others. It's good for car buyers. It's bad for taxpayers. ... But I'm encouraged by the response to cash-for-clunkers because it's a microcosm of what broad-based tax relief would do.

THB: Tell us about your health-care proposal and how it differs from that proposed by the Obama Administration.

Pence: I don't think the American people want government health insurance. ... If the polls are to be believed, most of those who have private health insurance like it. If government health care becomes a reality, you'll have fewer choices.

Give the American people a health-care plan similar to what Congress has - and bring about tort reform. Defensive medicine, brought on by multi-million dollar malpractice suits, is driving up the cost of health care. Doctors tell you you have to have three tests, when the first would have (sufficed), because health insurance demands it.

What Congress has, the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, offers five options, is exempt from state regulation and can be purchased across state lines. When you have a larger pool of people to share the risks, it brings premiums down. ...

A competitive environment will always bring lower costs than a bureaucracy.

THB: You're all over the TV news programs and very visible.

Pence: Sorry about that. (Laughs)

My role as conference chairman is to drive the communications effort for the party. ... But I've got more people in my office working on policy than working on press releases. ... In my first eight years (as a congressman), I wasn't in this position, and I bristled at the idea of leadership telling people to be on message. ... What I do now is not so much push the message as push what our people are doing. We have a lot of really sharp people on our side, and I evaluate what they're doing and get the message out.

- Compiled by Scott Underwood
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